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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 001331

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - (ADDED CAPTION)

SENSITIVE  
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TAGS: [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [VM](#)  
SUBJECT: VIETNAM'S DIVERSE BUT POLITICALLY LIMITED CIVIL  
SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (C-AL8-01684)

REF: A. STATE 92765  
[1](#)B. 07 HANOI 750  
[1](#)C. 07 HANOI 1215  
[1](#)D. 07 HANOI 1246  
[1](#)E. 07 HANOI 2617  
[1](#)F. HANOI 1102

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[1](#)1. (U) The responses below are keyed to questions in Ref A.  
This cable is not meant for Internet distribution and should  
remain within USG channels.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Summary: Most of Vietnam's growing and varied civil  
society organizations administer to the poor and  
disadvantaged. They have limited impact in influencing  
government decisions and in holding leaders accountable. The  
Party's six mass organizations are now drafting laws and  
doing a better job of representing the interests of their  
membership at the local level. Our civil society contacts  
say the GVN wants more "safe" groups to take on social tasks  
it cannot. However, these contacts add that some GVN  
officials worry about civil society organizations fomenting  
"color revolutions." End Summary.

#### A Plethora of Organizations

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[1](#)3. (SBU) Vietnam has many different types of organizations,  
associations and groups. Most of these organizations provide  
services to the poor and disadvantaged. Their impact in  
influencing public policies on human rights, social policy  
and national budgeting, and in holding the state and private  
sectors accountable, is limited. The role of the Party's six  
mass organizations has evolved in that they now are drafting  
laws and are doing more to represent the interests of people  
at the grassroots level. The GVN wants more "safe" groups to  
take on social tasks that it cannot but some GVN officials  
worry about civil society organizations fomenting "color  
revolutions," according to our contacts. The GVN has moved  
cautiously in granting civil society "more space."

[1](#)4. (U) The Communist Party of Vietnam's "mass  
organizations" (MOs) are: the Fatherland Front (FF), the  
Women's Union (12 million members), Farmers' Association (8  
million members), General Federation of Labor (4.25 million  
members), War Veterans Association (1.92 million members) and  
Ho Chi Minh Youth Union (5.1 million members). The FF  
functions as an umbrella group for 29 organizations; among  
other things, it screens candidates for National Assembly  
elections. Historically, the MOs have had a special  
relationship with the Party. Organized hierarchically, the  
MOs have branches at each administrative level from the  
center to the provinces, districts, communes and villages.  
At the grassroots level, the MOs have some autonomy and can

act in their local settings, whereas the higher levels often serve as a career ladder both within the MOs and into government and Party positions.

15. (U) "Professional associations" can be divided into two major groupings: umbrella associations and professional associations. In the first category are some of the organizations under the FF, such as the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations, the Red Cross, Union of Art and Literature, and the Vietnam Lawyers' Association. Others are broad organizations like the Gardening Association, which is in 62 provinces and has a membership of about 700,000.

16. (U) "Vietnamese NGOs" (VNGOs) tend to be small organizations that: 1) deliver social services for the government in health or education, often charity based; 2) carry out research and social work; 3) help marginalized groups; 4) work like consulting companies for the GVN or Donors in preparing and implementing programs. VNGOs are often more innovative than other organizations, but are limited in impact and have limited funding. They view their role quite differently from their foreign counterparts; VNGOs see themselves as partners working on development projects in support of state policy and as advocates for improved state services. There is a strong tendency for VNGOs to negotiate with and educate state officials rather than confront them as a tactic to bring about change.

17. (U) "Community-based organizations" (CBOs), estimated to number from 100,000 to 200,000 groups, work to improve people's livelihoods and include groups like water-user groups, pig- or cow-farming groups, youth groups, mutual assistance groups and education and training groups. Cities have neighborhood groups, family clan groups, and groups taking care of festivals and pagodas. As they operate at the grassroots level, CBOs have no independent legal framework for their activities. Presumably, a large number of CBOs are

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not registered at all.

#### The Registration Process

18. (U) Associations desiring to work throughout Vietnam must gain approval to do so from the Ministry of Home Affairs' Department of NGO Affairs. The overwhelming majority of national level organizations have registered under VUSTA, the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations (VUFO) and the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VNCCI). This is because VUSTA, VUFO, and VNCCI have long worked throughout Vietnam and their leaders are respected and relatively senior Communist Party members. Estimates are that Vietnam has roughly 400 associations operating nationally. Organizations or associations seeking to operate in particular areas of Vietnam are required to get approval from provincial or city people's committees and local offices of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

19. (U) The GVN's Law on Science and Technology became operational in 2001. This law allows Vietnamese to establish science and technology organizations with local science and technology departments. Vietnamese seeking to open a science and technology organization technically do not have to go through the city people's committee. A group of Vietnamese intellectuals took advantage of the Law on Science and Technology to register the Institute for Development Studies, which is pushing the reform envelope (Ref. F), with the Hanoi City Department of Science and Technology. IDS scholars did not have to go through a several stage process at the Central level to register their institute.

#### The Long Odyssey of the Law on Associations

¶10. (U) The Law on Associations (LOA) remains in limbo. It is not on the National Assembly's 2009 agenda. The Ministry of Home Affairs' Department of NGO Affairs is in the midst of revising the law for the 12th time. (Refs D and E discuss the difficulties in passing the 11th draft version of this law.)  
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